

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07  
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
USIA-06 EURE-00 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 /072 W  
-----102285 191656Z /50

P 191538Z AUG 77  
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7461

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E.O. 11652: N/A  
TAGS: PINT US  
SUBJECT: LABOR RETAINS LADYWOOD SEAT

REF: (A) LONDON 13788, (B) LONDON 12777

SUMMARY: LABOR CANDIDATE RETAINED LADYWOOD SEAT IN BY-ELECTION AUGUST 18, WITH MAJORITY DROPPING FROM 9,739 TO 3,825. PARTICIPATION IN POLL WAS ONLY 43 PERCENT OF ELECTORATE. EIGHT CANDIDATES FAILED TO GARNER ENOUGH VOTES TO SAVE THEIR DEPOSITS, AND NATIONAL FRONT CAME IN THIRD AHEAD OF LIBERALS. END SUMMARY.

1. LABOR CANDIDATE, JOHN SEVER, WON LADYWOOD BY-ELECTION AUGUST 18 WITH 8,227 TO 4,402 FOR HIS CONSERVATIVE OPPONENT, AND EIGHT OTHER CANDIDATES SHARED VOTE OF 2,855. OF THESE, NATIONAL FRONT HAD 123-VOTE LEAD OVER LIBERAL PARTY CANDIDATE, BUT ALL EIGHT MINOR PARTY CANDIDATES LOST DEPOSITS.

2. LABOR VICTORY IS NO SURPRISE, THOUGH CONSERVATIVES HAD HOPED TO MAKE SOMEWHAT STRONGER SHOWING, AND SOME HAD EVEN SMELLED POSSIBLE VICTORY. SWING TO CONSERVATIVES, HOWEVER, WAS ONLY 8.7 PERCENT, CONSIDERABLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LOWER THAN IN PREVIOUS BY-ELECTIONS.

3. TRADITIONALLY, BY-ELECTIONS IN BRITISH POLITICS ARE UNRELIABLE INDICATORS OF TRENDS AND SOMEWHAT SHAKY BASIS FOR PROGNOSIS. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE IN THE CASE OF LADYWOOD, A DEPRESSED BIRMINGHAM CONSTITUENCY WITH HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT, POOR HOUSING AND HEAVY IMMIGRANT

POPULATION. LADYWOOD WAS VACATED BY LABOR MP BRIAN WALDEN, WHO TOOK A TV POSITION SUCCEEDING PETER JAY.

4. LADYWOOD FURTHERMORE BECAME THE SCENE OF THE NATION'S SECOND RECENT NATIONAL FRONT DEMONSTRATION AND THE RESULTANT VIOLENCE AUGUST 15 BETWEEN THE NF AND THE SOCIALIST WORKERS' PARTY, A TROTSKYITE PARTY. THE ATMOSPHERE OF HEIGHTENED TENSION CONTINUED THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN AND EVEN FLARED UP AGAIN WHEN THE SWP CANDIDATE STRUCK THE NP CANDIDATE WHEN THE RESULTS WERE ANNOUNCED OFFICIALLY.

5. ANOTHER INCIDENT IN THE UNTIDY CAMPAIGN WAS THE ABRUPT RESIGNATION OF THE CHIEF LABOR CONSTITUENCY'S FUNCTIONARY IN LADYWOOD BECAUSE OF ALLEGATIONS OF HIS POSSIBLE CONNECTIONS WITH THE BRITISH MOVEMENT AND THE EXTREME RIGHT WING. THE LABOR PARTY ORGANIZATION, HOWEVER, WITHSTOOD THIS SHOCK AND CONTINUED TO FUNCTION WELL.

6. THE LIBERALS CAN TAKE LITTLE COMFORT IN THE ELECTION, NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE THEY LOST THEIR DEPOSIT, BUT BECAUSE THE NATIONAL FRONT SQUEEZED IN AHEAD OF THEM INTO THIRD PLACE. THE LIBERAL VOTE DROPPED FROM OVER 3,000 TO 765 AND WILL BE CITED AS PROOF THE PARTY IS SUFFERING BECAUSE OF THE LIB-LAB PACT.

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7. FOR THE CONSERVATIVES, THERE IS A MEASURE OF COMFORT IN RETAINING THE CONSERVATIVE VOTE AT ABOUT THE SAME LEVEL (AROUND 22-23 PERCENT) AS IN OCTOBER 1974, DESPITE THE REDUCED TURNOUT. WHERE THERE CAN BE LESS SATISFACTION IS IN THE SIZE OF THE "SWING" TO CONSERVATIVES AND IN THE APPARENT FAILURE TO CAPTURE SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT FROM THE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY. THE CONFEDERATION OF INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS ADVISED THE 12,000 OR SO ASIANS IN THE CONSTITUENCY IN A CIRCULAR ON WEDNESDAY NOT TO VOTE LABOR; HOWEVER, IT SEEMS SOME ASIANS REMAINED LOYAL TO LABOR, SOME SUPPORTED ASIAN CANDIDATES OF OTHER PARTIES, AND MANY DID NOT BOTHER TO VOTE.

8. THE CONSERVATIVE VOTERS BACKED THEIR CANDIDATE, QUENTIN DAVIES, LOYALLY, BUT HE WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT THE RIGHT CANDIDATE TO APPEAL EITHER TO THE UNCOMMITTED OR TO THE LABOR-DISAFFECTED VOTERS. DAVIES, A BANKER, IS BRIGHT, WELL-EDUCATED, A FORMER MEMBER OF THE BRITISH DIPLOMATIC SERVICE, AND NOW A "CITY" MAN. HE PROBABLY SEEMED JUST THE RIGHT CHOICE TO THE CONSTITUENCY'S TORY

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SELECTION COMMITTEE, BUT IN MANY WAYS HE WAS AN ILLOGICAL CHOICE FOR THE LADYWOOD CONSTITUENCY.

9. THE WINNER, JOHN SEVER, WHO WILL PROBABLY TAKE HIS SEAT OCTOBER 26 WHEN PARLIAMENT RECONVENES AFTER RECESS, IS A LOCAL MAN. HE HAS BEEN ON THE COUNCIL AND ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY AFFAIRS AND BASED HIS CAMPAIGN PRIMARILY ON LOCAL ISSUES.

10. THE CALLING OF THE LADYWOOD ELECTION FOR PRIME VACATION TIME, A CONTROVERSIAL DECISION WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY, SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN WELL JUSTIFIED. BRIAN WALDEN REPORTEDLY SUGGESTED THAT THE SEAT REMAIN VACANT UNTIL NOVEMBER BUT WAS OVERRULED BY THE PRIME MINISTER, WHO IS SAID TO HAVE BELIEVED THAT LABOR WOULD DO BETTER BEFORE RATHER THAN AFTER THE PARTY CONFERENCE. THE LADYWOOD RESULTS, FRAGMENTARY AND INCONCLUSIVE AS THEY ARE, DO SHOW CALLAGHAN'S POLITICAL ACUITY AND ARE A MORALE BOOST FOR THE PARTY. AFTER ALL, THE LABOR CANDIDATE WON AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY OF THE POLL.

11. WHAT IS SOMEWHAT DISTURBING, HOWEVER, IS THE  
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NATIONAL FRONT SHOWING, THE POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION OF THE ELECTORATE WITH EIGHT HOPELESS CANDIDACIES, AND THE VIOLENCE. WHILE THERE IS SOME SATISFACTION THAT NEITHER OF THE EXTREMES, RIGHT AND LEFT, POLLED A LARGE PERCENTAGE, THERE IS LEGITIMATE CONCERN ABOUT THE POLARIZATION OF THE ELECTORATE WITH THE EXTREMES CAPTURING THE HEADLINES AND THE EMOTIONS IF NOT THE VOTES.

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